

Greatness of God in Isaiah

Gary Fisher

Introduction:

- I. The entire Bible is the story of God
 - A. He is the main character
 - B. Isaiah especially emphasizes God and who He is
- II. Importance of Isaiah emphasizing God
 - A. In a pagan world, the Israelites needed to be reminded of God's uniqueness
 - B. When they went into captivity the Israelites would need to be reassured that God still reigned on His throne
- III. This outline
 - A. Merely scratches the surface of the teaching of Isaiah about God
 - B. Perhaps it can serve as the starting point for a more detailed study of the subject

Body:

I. Important Chapters That Describe God's Greatness

A. Chapter 6

1. Call of Isaiah
 - a. Apparently chapters 1-5 are a preface (a précis) to the book
 - b. Then God calls Isaiah in an incredible vision
2. In the year the king died, Isaiah sees the King! (1-4)
 - a. In any time of tragedy, we need to see the Lord on His throne
 - b. He is lofty and exalted (52:13; 57:15)
 - 1) Man's efforts to exalt himself seem ludicrous in this light
 - 2) There is a notable reluctance on the part of Bible writers to describe God
 - c. The seraphim proclaim His holiness
 - 1) Seraphim
 - a) Name means "burning ones"
 - b) Evidently an exalted angelic order
 - c) Their wings are used to cover themselves (suggesting modesty in the Lord's presence) and to fly (suggesting that they could quickly fulfill His requests)
 - 2) They announce God's holiness
 - a) Comparative and superlative degrees are expressed in Hebrew by doubling, or rarely, tripling the word (holy of holies, song of songs, etc.)
 - b) The only triple repetition regarding God

- c) Those who are closest to God describe Him as holy and glorious
 - d) Thus, Isaiah customarily designates God as the “Holy One of Israel”
- d. Note the fullness of God [“filling the temple” (1), full of His glory (3), filling with smoke (4)]
- 3. Isaiah confesses and is cleansed (5-7)
 - a. In the presence of the Holy God, Isaiah recognizes his sin
 - 1) Sins of the tongue are fundamental (Jas. 3)
 - 2) Appropriate to a context of praise to God and prophetic mission
 - b. God purifies Isaiah
 - 1) By a coal from the altar, symbolizing atonement through sacrifice
 - 2) It is appropriate that a burning one picks up a live coal
 - 3) Isaiah has to be purified before he is equipped to serve
- 4. The Lord commissions Isaiah (8-13)
 - a. The plurality of God asks for a volunteer
 - b. Isaiah does
 - 1) He is prompt to volunteer, even before he knows the mission
 - 2) After we are forgiven, we should serve
 - c. The mission
 - 1) To preach to people that won’t listen
 - 2) Until they are destroyed
 - 3) Israel is so corrupt that one more rejection of the truth will confirm the nation in its wicked way
 - 4) Isaiah does not have the luxury of preaching only to receptive people
 - a) We tend to turn preaching into something glamorous
 - b) Human response is not an accurate barometer of the faithfulness of the messenger

B. Chapter 40

- 1. God is greater than **the created world** (12-14)
 - a. Measures that one uses for small tasks (hollow of hand, span, scales) -- highlights the immensity of the Creator relative to the world He created
 - b. God is so big that he deals with the whole universe the same way that men deal with minute objects
 - c. After cupping water in His hand, God says, now the Atlantic goes here and the Pacific goes there ...
 - d. God is self-sufficient and independent; He did not solicit advice upon creating the world
- 2. God is greater than **the nations** (15-17)

-
- a. God dominates history with the same ease that he dominates nature
 - b. The nations are like dust on the scales: who complains about a speck of dust when the deli manager weights out sliced ham or cheese?
 - c. Isaiah writes this at a time when Israel feels threatened by the great super-powers of their world
 - d. Even the greatest human religious endeavors cannot reach up to His greatness
 - 1) If Lebanon were an altar, its forests the fuel, its animals the sacrifices it would still be inadequate to honor the Lord
 - 2) We have nothing that we can do to put God in our debt
3. God is greater than **the idols** (18-20)
- a. Links with a major theme of this part of Isaiah
 - b. The quality of the product is under the control of the maker
 - c. The description of the process of the manufacture of the idol is its own satire
 - d. Must choose a good quality wood so that your god doesn't rot too fast and hire an expert to construct it so that it doesn't fall (it stinks to have a god that rots quickly or topples over in a breeze)
 - e. The greatest proof of its uselessness: despite the careful preparations the thing is designed for immobility
4. God is greater than **the rulers** (21-24)
- a. God extends the skies with the ease that one stretches out a fine curtain
 - b. The kings before whom the peoples tremble are tumbleweeds before the mere puff of God's breath
 - c. They plan their great strategies and the Lord wrecks their schemes whenever he wants to
 - d. The exiles should not be awed by the power of Babylon
5. God is greater than **the stars** (25-26)
- a. God is in a category by Himself
 - b. Directs the stars as if He were the commander of an immense army
 - c. Jack Cottrell: "Our sun is just one of a total of around 100 billion stars in the Milky Way galaxy. It is estimated that there are nearly 100 billion galaxies within the observable universe. Our galaxy is approximately 100,000 light years wide. (A light year is about 5,865,686,000,000 miles). The average distance between neighboring galaxies is 10 million light years. The magnitude of the act of creation is simply beyond our comprehension. 'For He spoke, and it was done' (Psalm 33:9)." *(What the Bible Says About God the Creator, 130)*
6. God is greater than **discouragement** (27-31)
- a. We should see the greatness of God in terms of His strength for us
 - b. He never wears down so we should wait patiently for Him
 - c. His spiritual strength can make believers like
-

- 1) Soaring eagles
- 2) Runners in competition
- 3) Hiker on a long trek

II. The Greatness Of God Highlighted In Texts

A. Isaiah 2

1. Note the exaltation of God's mountain
2. Note how every high thing of man is brought down: natural resources (13-14), defenses (15), technical and cultural achievements (16)
3. God alone is exalted (11, 17)
4. Man seeks shelter either natural or man-made
5. In that day men will impulsively throw their idols out
 - a. To the moles and the bats
 - b. We should judge everything by the standard: How we will value it on the day of the Lord?
6. Must learn not to exalt men: He is nothing more than the breath in his nose (22)

B. Isaiah 8:9-10

1. Nations are challenged to do the worst they can; almost taunts them
2. Nothing devised against God or His people can stand

C. Isaiah 14:24-27

1. Assyria is the world empire of Isaiah's day
2. Note that all is determined by the plan of the Lord

D. Isaiah 17:12-14

1. Notice the awesome appearance and roaring of the nations
2. The simple word of the Lord governs the world (Psa. 2:4-6; 46:6)
3. Probably envisions Isaiah 37:36

E. Isaiah 24:17-18: Cannot escape from God (cf. Amos 5:18-20)

F. Isaiah 24:23: God outshines the sun

G. Isaiah 26:5-6

1. God brings down the exalted
2. To the point where the lowly walk on them

H. Isaiah 29:5-8

1. The enemies are like dust and chaff before the Lord
2. Their premature rejoicing over the demise of God's people suddenly vanishes like a dream

I. Isaiah 30:27-33

1. Terrible judgment images

2. While God's people play music! (cf. 2 Chron. 20)

J. Isaiah 37:21-38

1. God doesn't allow the enemy to escape
2. The Assyrians were arrogant and didn't even realize that what they did was part of the Lord's plan
3. God puts His hook in their nose and turns them around and sends them home
4. Nisroch cannot even save the king from his own sons in his own temple!

K. Isaiah 59:15-21

1. The Lord outfitted as a warrior
2. He blesses His people and punishes the adversaries

L. Isaiah 63:1-6

1. Treading the wine press is a figure of judgment
2. The Lord's clothes are red because of the blood of His enemies as He has by Himself gained the victory

III. God Vs. The Idols

A. Isaiah 41:1-7

1. God challenges the nations to resolve the controversy of who has the better case to be God (1)
2. The Lord determines the course of the great world conqueror Cyrus (2-3)
 - a. The Lord
 - 1) Initiates his career
 - 2) Is his master
 - 3) Determines what he does and how
 - b. Cyrus' power
 - 1) No opposition can stand before him
 - 2) He does not have to retrace his steps
3. The greatness of God (4)
 - a. He is the beginning and the end
 - b. Cyrus is just one example of God's creative power
4. The nations respond by building better idols (5-7)
 - a. Each workman encourages the other trying to keep up an optimistic appearance
 - b. They try to make a really good, strong set of gods!
 - c. Result of human skill, human approval, human stability
 - d. When finished, the idol is nailed fast so that it cannot move because it really hurts morale when your god falls over!

B. Isaiah 41:21-29

1. The challenge to the idols to present their case (21-24)
 - a. It is the idols' turn to show what power they had
 - b. The idols should show their plans and how they carry them out
 - c. Or, at least, they should prove they are alive by doing something!
 - d. The judgment against the idols because they cannot show any prophecy, cannot even speak
2. Prophecy of the victories of Cyrus (25-29)
 - a. Cyrus comes from the north (25) and the east (2)
 - b. None can say that their idol said this would happen
 - c. The idols don't say anything; it is clear that the gods behind them are nothing; the idols don't represent anything
 - d. The verdict (29)

C. Isaiah 44:6-45:13

1. What God does (6-8)
 - a. The first and the last
 - 1) Idolatry usurps the place of God
 - 2) He determines the course of history from the beginning to the end
 - 3) Note how the first and the last are used of Jesus in Revelation (1:17; 2:8; 21:6; 22:13)
 - b. Fulfilled predictions are evidence of His control of the world
 - c. He is the only Rock
 - 1) Outside of Him there is nothing reliable to rest on
 - 2) He is the exclusive God
 - 3) God is the refuge of His people and the firm foundation of their hopes
2. Satire of idolatry (9-20)
 - a. Its foolishness (9)
 - 1) Compare witnesses of chapter 43
 - 2) Idols have no real existence; they are nothing more than gold-plated blocks of wood
 - b. Product of mere humans (10-13)
 - 1) God created the dust and made man from it; can the dust now take created material and form a god?
 - 2) Whether iron/blacksmith or wood/carpenter, the enterprise deserves nothing but ridicule
 - 3) The idol manufacturer gets tired (cf. 40:27-31)
 - 4) The product has nothing higher than the notion of men's beauty

-
- c. Based on material things (14-17)
 - 1) The existence of the wood from which the idols are made ultimately depends on whether it rains
 - 2) “The rest”: the part that wasn’t chosen for other uses!
 - 3) The god should be thankful to the worshiper that the stick of wood from which he was made was not chosen for fire to bake bread or to warm him
 - d. Foolishness (18-20)
 - 1) They lack the capacity to perceive their lack of comprehension
 - 2) They give themselves to slavery to a lie
 - 3. Contrast the redemption of Israel with the idolatry (21-23)
 - a. The idolater forms the idol (9-10, 12), but Israel was made by the Lord
 - b. The idolater asks the idol to save him (17), but the Lord redeems Israel
 - c. The idol bows down to a tree, but every tree is summoned to rejoice in the Lord
 - 4. God’s use of Cyrus (24-28)
 - a. Centrality of God: the focus should be on Him and not on our programs
 - b. God so controls the events of history as to cause the failure of the predictions of the diviners
 - c. Lord overcomes all obstacles which might stand in opposition to the execution of His will
 - d. Climax: the mystery person whose coming has been repeatedly mentioned is now named (cf., 1 Ki. 13:2)
 - 5. Words to Cyrus (45:1-8)
 - a. “My anointed”
 - 1) What an insult to Israel that a foreigner should be called God’s anointed
 - 2) Although God normally employed Israelites for such purposes, He is sovereign and may use anyone He wants to
 - 3) Isaiah sees in the redemption of Israel under Cyrus a parallel to the deliverance from sin by the Messiah
 - 4) Compare Jeremiah 25:9; 27:6; 43:10; 1 Kings 19:15-16
 - b. He triumphs over his enemies (1-2)
 - 1) The Lord is the one who conducts Cyrus to the stage of history, that forms the purpose for him to fulfill, that organizes his victories, that facilitates his progress, that enriches him with treasures
 - 2) The fortified cities are no obstacle to his advance
 - 3) God removes every barrier and clears the way before Cyrus
 - c. Purposes of God’s giving such help to Cyrus (3-7)
 - 1) Show Cyrus who He was (3)
-

-
- 2) Redeem Israel (4-5)
 - 3) Cause the nations to recognize that He is the only true God (5-7)
 - d. The heavens and earth raise a fruitful crop of salvation (8)
 - 6. God rebukes His critics (9-13)
 - a. Some Israelites are unhappy by God's use of a foreign king to accomplish His purpose (9-10)
 - 1) On what basis can we pass judgment on God's methods of carrying out His will?
 - 2) It is absurd to deny the existence of the hands by which it was produced
 - 3) Neither the potter nor the father should be questioned
 - b. God is the Creator of all (11-12)
 - 1) It makes no sense to doubt Him
 - 2) It is wise to let the Lord decide how to fulfill His goals
 - c. God's sovereignty in creation (12) is matched by His control of history (13)

D. **Isaiah 45:20-25**

- 1. The idols are inherently non-saving and their worshipers have to carry them
- 2. Perhaps they will be more successful consulting together (21)
- 3. Incidental proof of deity of Christ (cf. 23; Phil. 2:9-11)
- 4. Note also that all the offspring of Israel refers to the remnant (25; cf. Rom. 11:26)

E. **Isaiah 46:1-11**

- 1. The foolishness of idolatry (1-7)
 - a. The people have to carry their idols (1-2)
 - 1) The idols bow down vs. the people bow down before the Lord (46:1; cf. 45:23)
 - 2) Bel and Nebo are unable to rescue their own images!
 - 3) The tiredness of the animals underlines the impotence of the gods
 - a) They are a liability to man and beast!
 - b) Instead of giving strength to the weary (40:27-31), they cause weariness
 - b. God carries His people (3-4)
 - 1) What a contrast with the idols; false religion is based on works and the true on grace
 - 2) Emphatic "I" five times
 - c. The creation and maintenance of idols (5-7)
 - 1) God is nothing like idols, that depend on earthly materials, human activities, measurement, expense and expertise

- 2) It is absurd to pray to something that needs to be picked up, carried and set down
 - 3) Workman has to nail it down so that it doesn't fall over
 - 4) A thing that can't help itself can't help you
2. God predicts the future (8-11)
 - a. God foresees, predetermines and brings His purposes to completion
 - b. When He predicts the future, to a great extent He is simply revealing His own plan

F. Isaiah 48:12-16

1. Reference to Cyrus (44:28; 45:1; 46:11)
2. God hears, speaks, calls, directs, history, raises kings, gives them power and success, creates and sustains the universe
3. Call of God is governing factor in history
4. It is God, not Cyrus' ability that gives him success
5. It is impressive that Cyrus was called the beloved of the Lord (cf. 41:8 for the same word and 44:28; 45:1 for other words for Cyrus)

IV. The Great Ease With Which The Lord Acts

- A. 5:25: His outstretched hand causes the mountains to quake
- B. 5:26: A standard raised up and a whistle from the Lord bring an incredibly disciplined army
- C. 7:18-19: God whistles to control the armies of Egypt and Assyria
- D. 7:20: God shaves Judah with the Assyrian that she thought she had hired
- E. 10:5-6: He uses the Assyrian army as His paddle to whip Israel
- F. 10:33-34: God cuts down the Assyrians like a lumberjack clearing a forest
- G. 11:11-12: An outstretched hand and a lifted up standard bring back the dispersed of His people to Him (consider this passage along with Hosea 11:10-11 and Isaiah 56:8 as background symbolism for Matthew 24:31)
- H. 11:15: God's hand dries the river
- I. 13:2: Army is summoned by lifting a standard, raising His voice and waving His hand
- J. 14:23: Babylon is trash to be swept away by God's broom of judgment
- K. 18:4-5:
 1. The heat of the sun and the dew symbolize God's methods of operation
 2. Contrast the immense preparations of a powerful people with the ease with which God extinguishes the Assyrians in one night
 3. God's serenity, composure and calmness vs. the hustle and bustle of the Ethiopians
 4. Just like with the birth in Bethlehem, God operates without pomp or fanfare, but the world is forever changed
- L. 22:17-18: God rolls up Shebna and throws him away

- M. 33:3: God merely arises and the nations disperse
- N. 41:14-16: God turns worm Jacob into a chopper for mountains
- O. 42:1-4: Meek Servant transforms the world

Conclusion:

- A. 27:3-5:
 - 1. God zealously cares for His vineyard
 - 2. But He offers conditions of peace even to the thorns and thistles who turn to Him
- B. 26:3-4: The proper response to the greatness of God

Gary Fisher
 8980 Crawford Ct.
 New Salisbury, IN 47161
 fishers@otherside.com

Selected Bibliography

- Alexander, Joseph Addison, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1953.
- Childs, Brevard S., *Isaiah*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.
- Goldingay, John, *Isaiah*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2001.
- Grogan Geoffrey W., "Isaiah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (vol. 6). Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1986.
- Hailey, Homer, *A Commentary on Isaiah*. Louisville, KY: Religious Supply, 1992.
- McGuiggan, Jim, *The Book of Isaiah*. Lubbock: Montex Publishing Company, 1985.
- Motyer, J. Alec, *Isaiah*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999.
- Motyer, J. Alec, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- Oswalt, John N., *The Book of Isaiah* (volumes 1 and 2). Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986 and 1998.
- Webb, Barry G., *The Message of Isaiah*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996.
- Young, Edward J., *The Book of Isaiah* (3 volumes). Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1972.